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Mentoring Philosophy

My guiding star in mentoring is to help further my mentee's professional goals and their pursuit and development in becoming an independent scientist in an environment where everyone can succeed. In my research group, I encourage an interdisciplinary approach and provide a stimulating and challenging scientific environment in which members can exchange ideas, pursue independent research, and establish collaborations across disciplines. I adjust my advising style to each mentee's level of preparation and independence, and will give advice on both research and career-related issues such as professional development, career options, and work-life balance. To help my mentees build their scientific network, I connect them with colleagues who might become potential collaborators or mentors that can offer additional perspectives. While I am closely involved in the research of undergraduate and master's students, I expect a higher level of independence from doctoral students and postdocs.

Mentoring Plan

I develop a mentoring plan with all graduate students and postdoctoral scholars in my group as soon as they join. This plan includes what students can expect from me, major milestones for the degree if relevant, the mentee's short to long term goals, and semester-by-semester action plans to achieve those goals. It also lays out potential plans for products, meetings, as well as funding sources during the mentee's tenure in the group. What I love about this plan is that I revisit it with each person at the beginning of each semester. It is meant to be a living document throughout the semesters where not only the future crystalizes into focus as mentees discover their passions, but also a record of important milestones accomplished. For postdoctoral scholars specifically, there will be additional focus on immediate career goals and identifying what we can do together to achieve those goals. During the semester, I hold at least 30min 1:1 meetings with each mentee weekly, as well as weekly group meetings.

Evidence and Experience in Inclusive Mentoring

I completed my PhD at the University of New Mexico, a minority-serving institution with majority Hispanic and Native student populations. There, I advised students in the Sevilleta Field Station REU program (60% URM participation), including three published as first or co-authors. As a postdoc, I mentored Diné (Navajo) students in the summer Native American Student Mentorship Program at Utah State University, and was a founding member of the 500 Women Scientists Logan pod. Since establishing my lab at University of Georgia in 2019, I have prioritized growing an inclusive community that welcomes diverse voices, and the demographics of her lab reflect that work. In the past 4.5 years, 45% of my mentees identify as a person of color, and self-reported minoritized identities include diverse representation on the axes of race, gender identity, ethnicity, nationality, nontraditional, and first-generation student. I serve on the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) committee in Plant Biology, regularly serve as a conference mentor for the Ecological Society of America Strategies for Ecology Education, Diversity and Sustainability (SEEDS) program, as well as on career panels for various identity groups. Throughout my time in the professoriate, I have continuously educated myself in best practices, such as completing the 13 hr Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion at the University of Georgia. I encourage my mentees to bring their whole selves to work, and I work hard to make sure that it is safe and positive for them to do so.

Current research group description, professional development opportunities, and integration plan for FFIRE scholar

Our group currently consists of 1 postdoc, 6 PhD students, 1 lab manager, and 6 undergraduate students. My projection is that my group will shrink a little in the next few years as students graduate. Beyond the specific research projects described as a part of my mentor profile, members of the lab also conduct work in the southeastern longleaf pine forests, piedmont prairies, and in the alpine meadows of the Colorado Rockies. I hope the prospective FFIRE scholar would complement my group by forming cohort connections with my current postdoc, as well as be a leader and role model for my graduate students in what a future next step could look like for them. For all members of my lab, I have a lab onboarding guide that helps streamline the process of starting a new job and figuring out a new environment. We hold Fall welcome back and Spring celebration gatherings annually, which helps with social integration of new scholars. During weekly lab meetings, we present on current progress, solicit feedback on practice talks/proposals/manuscripts, read papers together, or hold discussions on professional development and DEI topics. These meetings help build intellectual camaraderie within the group. Outside the research group, the FFIRE scholar would also be connected with all other co-PIs and students collaborating on the relevant project, as well as field visits to become acquainted with the system. These co-PIs could potentially serve as additional informal mentors and job references. Finally, the UGA Plant Center is a fantastic community of plant scientists and an invaluable source of local networking and intellectual community.

In our group, professional development is targeted at the individual level and at the lab level. For example, we have invited speakers to our lab meetings to talk about their careers and field questions. We also devote meetings to topics such as science communication, writing strategies, etc. I also independently work with mentees to identify their career aspiration and key things to work on. For postdoctoral scholars whose goals are to win a tenure-track academic position, I provide iterative feedback on job application materials, practice job talks, as well as advice on interview practice and eventual resources for getting to job negotiations and acceptance. We also identify networking opportunities, any potential CV gaps, as well as opportunities to gain recognition via grants and awards. For those aiming for industry, government, or NGO positions, I tap into my network of colleagues to help provide a more “insider” view of the process. As someone who is still earlier in my career, I have fairly recent experience of what it’s like being on the job market as a postdoc, as well as experience from the other side having served on three faculty search committees.